

The Shame of Bureaucratic Rule in Alaska

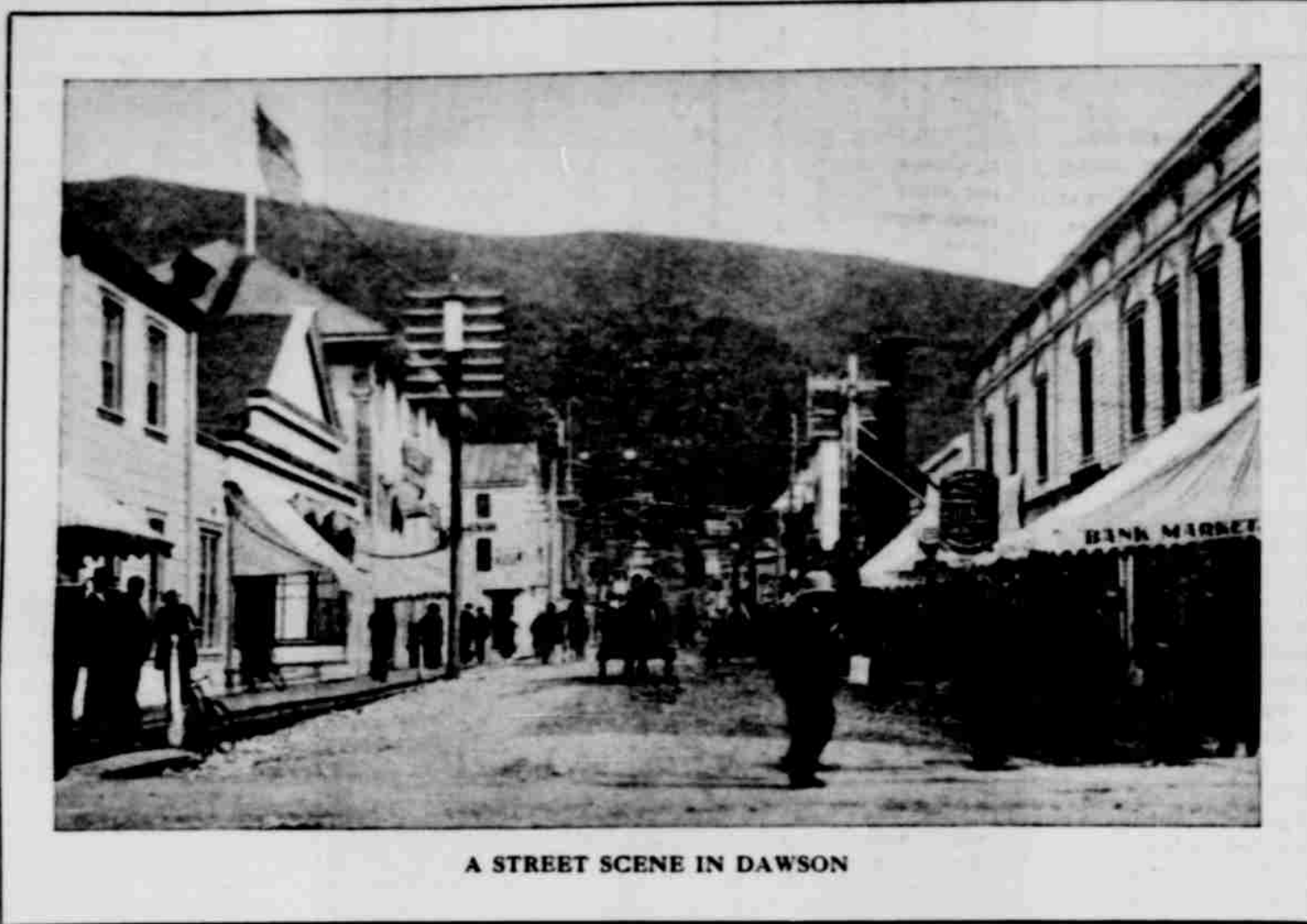
(Continued from last week)

ARATHER detailed notice of some of the agencies most obnoxious to the people of Alaska, although less in the general public eye than the great semi-law enacting bureaus, may as well be given. The Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska, for example, is perhaps the least esteemed in both its activities and personnel of all the governmental agencies in the Territory. This is because that agency deals with human life; the life of ignorant, childlike natives, in a manner that would or should bring a blush of shame to the face of an uncivilized savage. During the past twenty-five years thousands of helpless natives, men, women and little children, have literally starved to death, and other thousands died unnecessarily of disease, because of the utter, inexcusable, heartless neglect of the officials charged with their care. Year after year these simple wards of the United States Government must look to the charity of white citizens of Alaska to save them from death, while the highly paid officials charged with the duty of looking after them recline in comfortable chairs and explain their dereliction with pretexts so utterly false and so utterly contemptible that it is unthinkable Washington bureau chiefs are not cognizant of the shameful farce.

To accord a measure of consideration in a case where no consideration is due, and where no consideration is practiced except as it advances the comfort and welfare of its own agents and their ilk, it may be said the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska has always and invariably assigned lack of funds in explanation of its dereliction of duty to its charges. It has habitually whined that Congress pruned its appropriations to such an extent that it was unable to do more than maintain a corps of fat-salaried officials, willing and anxious to feed and doctor the unfortunate natives if money were available. This is certainly true to the extent that the salaries and expense accounts have always been provided. For a quarter of a century the same thing has continued year after year. One year disease and hunger would wipe out villages in a particular section of the Territory only to be followed the next year by a recurrence of identical conditions and identical results in another section; but always with the same excuse from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It would be an insult to the intelligence of these bureaucratic officials to pretend they do not know when and where such catastrophes among the natives are apt to occur. Every intelligent resident of Alaska knows, for not a summer passes but miners and trappers and travelers come in from the various districts with reports of conditions that foreshadow what the ensuing winter will bring to the native tribes.

Bureau Ignores Epidemic

WEEKS before the influenza epidemic attacked the natives of Kodiak and the western islands, its invasion of those regions was anticipated by every physician in this community. Under the peculiar conditions existing an absolutely effective quarantine could have been instituted. Moreover, Alaska doctors begged in vain that it be done. But in consonance with its usual practice the Bureau of Indian Affairs did nothing. Even after the introduction of the anticipated epidemic, when whole villages had been totally depopulated and other villages left with but a few starving, orphaned children, no hand was raised to help, save only by private citizens of Alaska and the manly crew of a United States ship that chanced at the moment to be cruising in adjacent waters. These private citizens, although many themselves were ill, and all were short of food and medicines, were forced by sheer humanity to take up and carry a burden for which the people of the United States supposed they had made ample provision, never dreaming that helpless public wards would be permitted to linger and die in anguish lest the alleviation of their suffering might deplete funds jealously guarded to pay bureaucratic salaries and expense accounts. The sum of \$90,000, pledged and advanced during this epidemic by private citizens of Alaska to save the natives from utter extermination in those parts, was assumed and paid out of its meager treasury by the last Territorial legislature. Congress was asked to reimburse the advance but refused, and as Congress is wholly guided in its actions with reference to Alaskan affairs by bureaucratic suggestion and advice, it is a safe inference that the very officials, whose shameful neglect and inhumanity lead directly to the unnecessary sacrifice of thousands of human lives, were also responsible for this virtual repudiation of its moral obligation by the American Government. Such instances are largely responsible for the bitter prejudice of the Alaskan people against bureaucrats and bureaucratic autocracy in government. Nobody believes, of course, that our bureaucratic officials are wholly or even largely insensible to moral duties, or the ordinary obligations of humanity, or the expediency of simple justice.



A STREET SCENE IN DAWSON

By THOMAS B. DRAYTON

The one rational conclusion is that, with directing heads domiciled thousands of miles away from the land where their authority is employed, and knowing nothing of the situation and nothing of its requirements, they merely accept the perfunctory reports of field subordinates without investigation, and thus cultivate and encourage a spirit of irresponsibility which eventually culminates in the pitiful spectacle of callous helplessness such as characterizes the Alaskan contingent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Canners' Combine Above Law

THE Alaskan people would gladly assume charge of the surviving natives; and they know how to guard and care for them. But the Alaskan people have no voice in governing themselves, much less the natives. With power to raise funds by local taxation for the care of these unfortunates, the constantly recurring disasters would immediately end. Even yet the remnant could be saved and be developed to a status of comparative usefulness, but under the guardianship of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska the final extinction of the native tribes is as inevitable as the passing of time.

Another agency that could not last a day longer if the American people had even an approximate line on its Alaskan activities is the Bureau of Fisheries. Its directing head and staff officers live comfortably in Washington City except when traveling occasionally at public expense. True, six separate individuals called wardens are apportioned and delegated to guard 2,600 miles of Alaskan coast line, on which are 135 separate packing plants employing 29,000 persons during the canning season. The ostensible purpose of keeping these six supposedly ubiquitous persons in Alaska is to enforce the fish laws throughout that immense stretch of territory. It may be said definitely and without reservation that the fish laws are not enforced and with equal definiteness that nobody familiar with the fishing industry in Alaska believes there is any purpose or intention on the part of the Bureau of

Fisheries to enforce the laws against these great packing companies. It can be said with equal finality that no man can become a member of the Bureau of Fisheries until his appointment has first been sanctioned by the fish trust. The great cannery, and likewise the men in the fresh fish combine, violate the fishing laws at pleasure. True, public records show that occasional complaints against them for particularly heinous offenses against these laws have been made, and occasional penalties imposed. But the same public records also disclose that such complaints have been sworn out by private citizens only, and that the penalties imposed have uniformly been fines of one dollar. No representative of the Bureau of Fisheries would dare file a complaint against any member or employee of the fish trust, unless indeed it were done as a subterfuge to head off and close, by the imposition of a nominal fine, a threatened case that might prove inconvenient to the fish trust if forced into a higher court by a private individual.

With a view to fixing direct responsibility for law violations tending to the complete extermination of our aquatic resources, Alaskans have long advocated the employment by the government of one warden at each big cannery. The cannery people have stood like a rock against this proposal, and the Bureau of Fisheries neither desires nor dares to oppose the trust veto. The result of law violations during recent years by these great fish-packing concerns points to the early extermination of the edible fish in Alaskan waters. Already the fish supply of Alaskan waters has been very greatly depleted. A salmon stream within sight of where this is written sees one salmon today, whereas at least a hundred salmon would have been seen ten years ago. A few years ago it was the custom of the writer to pack salmon for his private use, and on this very stream he could spear enough in an hour or so to last an entire winter. Today a fisherman of persevering and industrious character might spear two or three fish in a day, if he were reasonably lucky. It ought to be said in fairness that but few cases are as bad as the one just noted, but all streams are depleted to less than half of the runs of a few years ago. If the Bureau of Fisheries continues in control of the Alaskan fisheries for another ten years an Alaskan salmon will be at least a luxury, even if it has not become a curiosity. All Alaskan fishermen feel that the end of the fisheries as a great commercial asset is near, and each one is grabbing every fish in sight, and by every means, on the theory that if he does not get his share now, his competitors will. A great cannery was actually established at the mouth of the Yukon River three years ago by a packing company, with the intent, or at least the effect, of blocking the salmon in their efforts to reach their spawning grounds in the small tributary streams farther inland. The ultimate result will be the extinction of the fish; the immediate result was to deprive the inland natives of their natural food supply. Among the incidental results was a campaign of abuse and vituperation and vilification directed against Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, one of the most distinguished humanitarians in Alaska, because of his public protests against this wrong.

The Decrease in Salmon

A CONSIDERATION of actual figures will be perhaps the best answer to the many published stories, almost certainly inspired by the Bureau of Fisheries at the instance of the fish trust, ascribing the diminution in the catch to other causes than the true one. The Alaska salmon output, for example, was 6,667,000 cases in 1918, while 1919 shows an output of only 4,450,000 cases; a decrease of over 2,000,000 cases. Every well-informed man in Alaska, and every man directly engaged in the fishing industry, knows the reason for this decrease was overfishing; and there is no doubt in the minds of Alaska citizens that the specious explanations for the falling off of the catch were designed and intended to divert Congressional attention from the threatened extinction of the Alaskan salmon.

By every moral and equitable consideration the fish in Alaskan waters rightfully belong to the people of Alaska, yet the people to whom this once great but disappearing natural resource properly belongs get practically nothing from it in financial benefits. Indeed, what little the people of Alaska do derive from the Alaskan fisheries in the way of taxes is the outcome of a mistake, an oversight, in the original drafting of the Act of Congress granting a minute measure of authority to the then created Alaska Territorial Assembly. By this inadvertence, in a bill chiefly distinguished for the powers it expressly withholds, the Assembly was not denied the right to tax certain industries. The Assembly at once seized upon the oversight and enacted a law fixing a graduated tax, depending on class of fish, which averages about four and one-half cents a case. This tax produces a rev-

HEREWITH is presented the second installment of Mr. Drayton's story on conditions in Alaska and what has come about as the result of misadministration by Washington agents.

THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT feels that it is performing a high public service in presenting this article, that the charges contained therein may be investigated and relief offered if conditions are as pictured. We do know that an amelioration is under way as a result of John Barton Payne having come into office as Secretary of the Interior, and already the desire of the navy to safeguard its oil supplies has led to new exploration of the many thousands of acres of oil fields in the North Country.

There will be at least one further installment of Mr. Drayton's story.